

NATO and the Arab League: The Importance of Being Earnest¹

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With the situation in Syria continuing to deteriorate and a death tally of more than 70,000, the Arab League (AL)³ reached out to representatives of the Syrian opposition. Arab leaders offered the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) the seat of Syria in the AL's 24th Summit in Doha, which took place on 26 March 2013. In his address on that occasion, SNC leader Moaz Al-Khatib asked the US and NATO to extend "the umbrella of the Patriot missiles to cover the Syrian North". Al-Khatib added: "We are still waiting for a decision from NATO to protect people's lives, not to fight but to protect lives"⁴. NATO was quick in responding to Al-Khatib, but gave him the answer that he least wanted to hear. The Alliance's Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen confirmed: "(W)e have no plans to change the purpose of, and coverage of the deployed Patriot missiles"⁵.

NATO's response came as no surprise to many. What was remarkable, however, was Al-Khatib's decision to approach NATO from the AL Summit. He was probably encouraged by the Alliance's prominent cooperation with the AL during Operation Unified Protector (OUP), NATO's military operation in Libya. This came after the AL's decision to support a no-fly zone over Libya and its call upon the United Nations Security Council to impose this immediately. Only five days after the League's call, UNSCR 1973 was issued under chapter VII of the UN Charter, providing a legal framework for NATO's intervention in Libya. Subsequently, in the Chicago Summit Declaration in 2012, the Alliance applauded the great effort made by the AL in the Libya operation. (Among the various Arab countries, Qatar, the UAE and



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³ The Arab League was established in 1945 and is composed of 22 Arab member states.

⁴ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/26/us-syria-crisis-summit-idUSBRE92P08G20130326>

⁵ www.acus.org/natosource/white-house-and-nato-chief-rule-out-using-patriot-missiles-support-syrian-rebels.



Jordan had played an important role.) There thus seemed every reason to think, as Al-Khatib did, that there was a long-lasting partnership between NATO and the AL – or, at least, a clear vision of how both organizations should work together to build a strategic partnership and to maintain peace and security.

The truth is that this was never the case.

The cooperation between NATO and the AL was limited to Libya – to be more precise, it went no further than OUP. This paper argues that, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, NATO needs to institutionalize its cooperation initiatives towards AL, if it wishes to establish a strategic, sustainable and long-term partnership with the Arab world. What is emphasized is that NATO should invest more in developing its relations with the AL, the institution that combines all Arab countries and gives expression to their commonalities.

The paper is divided into four parts. In the first part, it investigates NATO's existing partnership programmes towards Arab countries, and discusses the limitations of such frameworks. The second part of the paper then argues that NATO's cooperation with the AL can afford an effective framework that complements – and in no way substitutes – existing frameworks. Thirdly, the obstacles to further development of partnership between the two organizations will be discussed. Finally, the paper ends with policy recommendations on how both NATO and the AL can bridge their differences and overcome the obstacles to greater cooperation.

MD, ICI *et al.*: mere tactics or a functioning strategy?

In the Chicago Summit Declaration, NATO member states underlined the importance of strengthening the Alliance's "wide range of partnerships". NATO's reconfirmation of this commitment was consistent with its 2010 Strategic Concept, in which cooperative security is identified as one of the three "essential

core tasks" for the Alliance, coming after collective defence and crisis management. The Chicago Summit devoted particular attention to NATO's partnerships with Arab countries⁶, represented in the framework of the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI). This attention came in response to a number of developments: 1) the wave of revolutions that swept through the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, raising concerns for its security and stability; 2) NATO's subsequent military involvement in Libya, implemented through OUP; 3) the significant role played by Arab countries, particularly through the AL, in NATO's operation in Libya. Nevertheless, the Chicago Summit Declaration showed major problems in the Alliance's approach to future engagement with the MENA region. First, the document identified the MD and ICI as the main frameworks through which NATO should approach the MENA region. Second, while acknowledging the significant role played by the AL during OUP, the declaration offered no suggestions on how the Alliance might engage in further cooperation, particularly with regard to post-Gaddafi security arrangements in Libya.

It is quite significant that NATO's interest and engagement in the MENA region is expected to increase, though OUP came to an end in October 2011. Moaz Al-Khatib's plea to NATO and the ongoing speculation in the Arab world about the possibility of a NATO intervention in Syria, particularly after the deployment of Patriot missiles near the Turkish-Syrian border, suggest that NATO's interest in the MENA region will not be diminishing in the near future. It is therefore important to assess NATO's practical readiness for engagement with the region. In other words: do existing partnership frameworks (MD, ICI), arrangements with Global Partners like Iraq and dialogue with other actors like the African Union (AU) provide a sufficient basis for organizing future cooperation? It is also important to envisage the availability of alternative frameworks that NATO should invest in more.

In tracking the development of NATO's partnerships with countries of the Arab world, one cannot ignore the significant progress that has taken place since these

⁶ The Chicago Summit Declaration dedicated unprecedented space (at least seven articles) to NATO's partnership with the Middle East.



relations first began. Development of dialogue has nevertheless been slow and essentially reactive, not proactive. Following the collapse of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact, which provided NATO with its *raison d'être*, the Alliance had to reinvent itself in adapting to the post-Cold War era. This included enhancing NATO's global outreach through various partnership programmes directed towards different parts of the world. The MENA region was no exception. In 1994, NATO launched the MD as a framework for partnership with southern Mediterranean countries. Current members are: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia⁷. The objectives of the MD are to: "contribute to regional security and stability, achieve better mutual understanding, dispel any misconceptions about NATO among Dialogue countries"⁸. Ten years later NATO launched the ICI, for the Gulf states. However, only four decided to join: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE. Unlike the MD, the ICI aims at offering partner countries "practical bilateral security cooperation with NATO"⁹. In other words, the two initiatives are significantly different, not only in terms of their geographical orientation but also with regard to their aims and objectives.

Regardless of the achievements that both initiatives were able to fulfil, including the strengthening of political ties between NATO and various countries in the MENA region, neither of them is an adequate vehicle for NATO's increasing interest in the region. Indeed, they might actually hinder the Alliance's future engagement with the Arab world, for a number of reasons. First, while the MD aimed at creating a platform for political discussions and deliberation that would facilitate future cooperation among its partners in the Mediterranean region, its success has in practice been based on Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programmes (IPCPs). These fall

within NATO's 28+1 format (according to which NATO's 28 members cooperate with one partner country). Of the MD countries, only Algeria has no IPCP¹⁰. While IPCPs have moved relations with the MD from mere dialogue into concrete military cooperation between NATO and its partners in the Mediterranean, this development has complicated multilateral NATO-MD or intra-MD cooperation.

The second reason for which current arrangements may hinder further development of NATO cooperation with the MENA region is that, by grouping Arab countries with Israel, the MD gives the impression that NATO is seeking to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict. While the Alliance has expressed its hope that a settlement will be found, it has also stated that it cannot intervene actively in the dispute. This has hindered cooperation between NATO and Mediterranean partners, who perceive that the Alliance is not doing enough to strengthen the Middle East peace process.

A third factor impeding greater development of partnerships in the MENA region is that, although the ICI was meant to overcome some of the MD's shortcomings by focusing on concrete military cooperation with partner countries, it has turned into little more than a club in this respect: members only really cooperate with NATO on a bilateral basis, which makes it difficult to enhance NATO's strategic cooperation with the region as a whole¹¹. Even in terms of bilateral military cooperation between NATO and individual ICI partner countries, nothing has actually taken place¹². These countries prefer to sign joint defence pacts and bilateral cooperation programmes with influential countries within NATO, including the US and UK. The biggest drawback of the ICI, however, is the fact that Saudi Arabia and Oman, which account for 70% of Gulf defence

⁷ Algeria and Jordan joined the Mediterranean Dialogue after the other members.

⁸ NATO, 'NATO - Mediterranean Dialogue: Origins and Objectives', available online: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_60021.htm (last accessed 3/12/2012).

⁹ NATO, 'NATO - Istanbul Cooperation Initiative: Reaching Out to the Broader Middle East', available online: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-51CA8533-BB87FC7C/natolive/topics_58787.htm? (last accessed 3/12/2012).

¹⁰ Florence Gaub (2012), 'Against All Odds: Relations between NATO and the MENA Region', US Army Strategic Studies Institute, p. 8.

¹¹ For a detailed account of the challenges facing the MD and ICI, see Pierre Razoux, 'The NATO Mediterranean Dialogue at a crossroads', Research Paper, Research Division, NATO Defense College, Rome, no. 35, April 2008; and Pierre Razoux, 'What Future for NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative?', Research Paper, Research Division, NATO Defense College, Rome, no.55, January 2010.

¹² Personal Interview, Allied Joint Forces Command, Naples, Italy, February 2013.



spending, have not joined.

Apart from the MD and the ICI, the Alliance also engages with Arab countries through its cooperation with the AU and with Global Partners. NATO's cooperation with the AU started with support to AU missions in two African countries which are members of the AL: Sudan and Somalia. NATO provided airlifts to the AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS), and supported the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)¹³; it also offers assessment regarding the operational readiness of the African Standby Force and the regional Brigades, including the North African Brigade (composed of Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya). While NATO's cooperation with the AU as a whole suffers from various problems¹⁴, its engagement with Arab countries through the AU is limited. The Libyan operation stands as a stark illustration of how the role of the AU is limited when an Arab country is in crisis.

In addition to the partnership frameworks already discussed, NATO cooperates with Iraq as a Global Partner. NATO's relations with Iraq started after the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. From 2004 to 2011, NATO ran its training mission in Iraq (NTM-I), to enhance the capabilities of Iraqi security forces. On 24 September 2012, after failing to reach an agreement over the status of NATO's training mission, NATO and Iraq signed an IPCP. NATO's failure to incorporate Iraq into existing frameworks like the MD and the ICI, whether this be for geographical or political reasons, only reflects the unsystematic nature of the Alliance's partnership frameworks.

One might argue that the existing partnership frameworks are probably more than enough to enable NATO to engage with the MENA region, and that adding another framework will only add to the Alliance's long list of "not very successful but essential" partnership programmes. Nevertheless, the unsystematic nature of the existing

arrangements underlines the urgency of developing a comprehensive framework – not to supersede, but to complement and combine with the existing partnership programmes towards the MENA region.

What framework, and for what purpose?

In order to develop a functioning framework to enhance relations between NATO and Arab countries, the Alliance should draw lessons from OUP, which was conducted with the support of partners from the Arab world. One of the major successes of NATO's operation in Libya lay in the ability to mobilize regional support: Qatar and the UAE, both members of the ICI, contributed militarily to the operation, while Jordan, a member of the MD, provided technical support along with air assets¹⁵. More importantly, the AL's support for the no-fly zone over Libya was applauded by the international community and NATO. Overall, the AL's position towards OUP reflects a significant change in its attitude to NATO. Long criticized as a dysfunctional regional organization providing its members with little more than a platform for diplomatic deliberations, in the Libyan crisis the AL was seen to be engaging positively and cooperating actively with international partners in order to restore order and security in a changing region. The organization's efforts to reinvent itself as a major player in regional politics should be encouraged, and NATO should capitalize on the growing role of the AL.

OUP was seen as a military success, and even as a model for NATO interventions. The Alliance was able to: 1) mobilize regional support for the operation; 2) effectively protect thousands of civilians; 3) bring the operation to a halt and withdraw its forces smoothly. Despite these achievements, however, the lack of strategic cooperation between NATO and regional organizations like the AL hindered successful planning for post-Gaddafi Libya. This led to a deterioration in security, as seen in the assassination of the American

¹³ Sally Khalifa Isaac (2013), 'The Transatlantic Partnership and the AU: Complementary and Coordinated Efforts for Peace and Security in Africa', in Brooke A. Smith-Windsor (ed.), 'AU-NATO Collaboration: Implications and Prospects', NATO Defense College and Institute for Security Studies.

¹⁴ For further information, see Brooke A. Smith-Windsor (ed.), 'AU-NATO Collaboration: Implications and Prospects', NATO Defense College and Institute for Security Studies.

¹⁵ For exact figures of the Allies assets deployed in Libya during Operation Unified Protector, see: <http://www.iiss.org/whats-new/iiss-voices/operation-odyssey-dawn-ellamy-harmattan-mobile/> (last accessed 3/12/2012).



ambassador in Libya and the failure to clamp down on cross-border arms smuggling¹⁶. More recently, the militias have been in a position of almost ruling Libya, refusing to hand in their weapons or become part of a regular force. Although NATO did offer to provide security assistance in post-Gaddafi Libya, the offer was rejected by the country's National Transitional Council (NTC). It is not difficult to speculate on why the proposal was rejected, along with other initiatives from Arab countries. All security assistance offers were being presented to Libya in a bilateral format, with no coordination among the various actors who played a vital role during OUP. The provision of security assistance in the post-Gaddafi period seemed to be an arena for competition among NATO countries as well as those of the Arab world, making Libyans suspicious of the various initiatives. If the AL had been able to acquire the necessary expertise in security sector reform and interoperability (something that NATO could have helped with), it could have played a significant role in stabilizing Libya after the fall of Gaddafi.

Is the Arab League a capable partner?

While NATO emphasizes its political role, it stands primarily as a military alliance that improves the security of its members. The AL, on the other hand, remains a political regional organization, regardless of the Collective Arab Security Pact¹⁷ which was signed by its members in 1950 and never meaningfully activated. The different nature of the organizations has resulted in different visions, interests and objectives, which should be fully recognized.

The most significant question remains whether the AL is a capable partner, both able and willing to enhance cooperation with NATO so as to maintain peace and security in the MENA region. While the AL was set up to promote greater cooperation and integration among Arab countries, it has achieved very little in this respect, particularly with regard to security among its member states. As mentioned above, it does not offer its members a platform

for security issues. For many Arab citizens, the AL is nothing more than a talk-shop that masks deep-rooted rivalries among its members. There are several explanations for the AL's inefficiency and ineffectiveness, including lack of political will to cooperate among member countries, diversity in their political regimes (even more so after the Arab Spring), inter-Arab rivalries over leadership of the AL, a vague and dated charter, and limited institutional capacity (particularly with regard to security issues).

In 2004, under the leadership of its then Secretary General Amr Moussa, the AL started a process of reform, with a particular focus on questions related to peace and security. In 2006, Arab countries agreed to establish an Arab Peace and Security Council, with the responsibility of maintaining peace and security among Arab countries. This significantly changed the AL's role in conflict prevention, management and resolution. In addition, the organization has enhanced its crisis management capacity. It has created a data bank, to collect information about the various ongoing conflicts in the region: this should be the AL's prime source of information, available to policy-makers in situations of crisis¹⁸. The AL has also created an early warning system for crises, pooling expertise from its general Secretariat and providing frequent reports to the Arab Peace and Security Council. In addition, some years ago Arab countries recommended the setting up of a Board of Wise Personalities, who would be chosen by the AL Secretary General and would mediate in the event of conflicts among the AL's member states¹⁹.

However, the greatest increase in the AL's capacity to work as a security partner for NATO has been achieved since the Arab Spring. The organization has taken a number of unprecedentedly bold decisions, beginning with the freezing of Libyan membership and the support for international efforts to impose a no-fly zone over Libya. Similarly, in response to the continued atrocities against Syrian civilians, the AL has frozen Syria's membership and imposed economic sanctions on the Assad regime. The

¹⁶ The smuggling of weapons from Libya to Mali contributed significantly to the rapidly escalating crisis in the Sahel.

¹⁷ The Arab Defence Pact is officially known as the Treaty of Joint Defence and Economic Cooperation among the States of the Arab League.

¹⁸ Personal interviews by the researcher with Arab League officials, Cairo, December 2012.

¹⁹ Rodrigo Tavares (2009), 'Regional Security: The Capacity of International Organisations', Routledge, p. 110.



decision to offer the seat of Syria in the AL to the opposition forces represented by Syrian National Coalition was also a bold move, though it has proved controversial. While it might be early to assess the effectiveness of the AL in security issues on the basis of such decisions, one cannot ignore that it is becoming an active player in the Arab security arena. Above all, the organization is consistently demonstrating its willingness to play an active role in shaping the future of the Arab region.

Who wants to cooperate? The view from within NATO and the Arab League

When officials from both NATO and the AL are asked about the importance of cooperation between the two organizations, the answer is always clear and straightforward: “Of course, cooperation is important. We are looking forward to enhancing our cooperation.” When the question becomes how to enhance cooperation, and for what purpose, interviewees tend to pause and then speak about the importance of developing such cooperation “slowly”. This is a way of masking the obstacles that are undeniably hindering cooperation between the two organizations.

To start with the view from within NATO, one should not overestimate the Alliance’s rhetoric on partnerships, cooperative security, and the Comprehensive Approach, especially when it comes to cooperating with the AL. There is no agreement within the Alliance on whether the AL is a capable partner and worth cooperating with. Even those NATO member states that acknowledge the importance of enhancing cooperation with the AL prefer to deal with Arab countries outside the NATO framework, prioritizing bilateral security agreements with them. In addition, while NATO’s new Strategic Concept gives the impression that the Alliance is eager to cooperate with international organizations, this is not necessarily borne out in actual practice. It was the AL, not NATO, which first took the initiative in 2008 in terms of promoting cooperation

between the two organizations: Amr Moussa, at that time the AL’s Secretary General, visited NATO Headquarters in Brussels and addressed the North Atlantic Council. Moussa’s historic visit was appreciated by the Alliance, but no significant follow-up took place. A search on NATO’s website with the keyword “Arab League” produces few hits: a press statement on Amr Moussa’s visit with two pictures, and some documents on OUP. Between 2008 and 2011, there were hardly any substantial meetings between NATO and AL officials, apart from a few contacts between the respective secretariats²⁰. There has been no activity between the two organizations, and certainly none initiated by NATO, apart from low-profile activities like involvement of officials from the AL in NATO’s educational activities.

Even after the Alliance’s intervention in Libya, the only high-profile official visit of a NATO delegation to the AL Headquarters in Cairo took place in December 2012. The delegation met the AL’s Deputy Secretary General and – according to AL representatives – inquired about the possibility of signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two organizations. Apparently, the AL officials thought that this was premature²¹.

The request seems puzzling, given the Alliance’s lack of initiative in seeking cooperation with the AL: a MoU is usually signed between actors who have already achieved a high level of cooperation²². The rationale is perhaps more readily identified if one attempts to understand the Alliance’s agenda in cooperating with the AL: NATO seems to be interested in creating a “public diplomacy” with the AL, the ultimate aim being to improve the Alliance’s image in the Middle East and legitimize its activities. In other words, NATO’s strategy towards the AL is best described as that of a “legitimacy taker, rather than a partnership maker”. This was evident during and after OUP, with frequent mention of the AL during the operation and also in the Chicago Summit Declaration. Nevertheless, no significant partnership programmes have been introduced. NATO seems to insist on the primacy of “public diplomacy” and on

²⁰ Personal interview with official from NATO HQ, Brussels, January 2013.

²¹ Personal interviews with officials from the Arab League, Cairo, December 2012.

²² Even with the African Union, with which it cooperates considerably more than with the Arab League (NATO has a liaison office in Addis Ababa), the Alliance has not signed a Memorandum of Understanding.



the importance of improving the Alliance's image in Arab countries, following the logic that "before cooperating you have to look good". While there is some truth in this perspective, it is rather hard to "look good" without significant and concrete cooperation initiatives. The Alliance has not been very successful in defining its cooperative security approach to Arab countries²³, compounding this failure by investing in attempts to improve its image in the region but proposing no concrete cooperation projects in security, military affairs or crisis management (in all of which the Alliance retains a competitive advantage).

While the AL certainly sees the benefits of cooperating with NATO, it fears the consequences of doing so. As an official from the AL puts it, "when [the Arab League] starts to enhance its cooperation with NATO, we will have to be ready to answer a lot of questions". The AL seems suspicious of the Alliance's intentions of getting closer. A MoU between the two organizations can only be the end result of a long process of deliberation, discussions and hard bargaining. The introduction of glamorous initiatives that look good on paper but are not preceded by a significant two-way conversation will give the impression that NATO is interested only in gaining the public support of the AL, without considering it a capable and omnipresent partner.

That said, the AL itself is not clear on what cooperation programmes/projects with NATO could best serve its strategic, long-term objectives. AL officials reiterate the importance of cooperating with NATO in capacity building, particularly to develop the AL's newly established crisis management system. Nevertheless, the AL does not seem to have worked out a broader context within which to pursue its crisis management ambitions. Although the Arab Revolutions gave the AL new momentum in this respect, they also exacerbated internal divisions within the organization, reinforcing criticisms that it is incapable of pursuing a stronger regional role. The AL's Joint Defence Pact, the equivalent of NATO's Article Five, was in practice stillborn – regardless of the security challenges facing Arab countries, particularly after the Arab Spring. In other words,

the AL is less ambitious about enhancing security and military cooperation among its own member states. It seems that its attempts to enhance its security capacities lack a strategic vision. In addition, individual AL member states prefer bilateral relations with NATO or with NATO member states, undermining the AL's capacity as a platform for cooperation with NATO.

NATO and the Arab League: an impossible partnership? Policy recommendations

Regardless of these challenges facing both NATO and the AL, there is still scope for greater cooperation between the two. In this section, the paper provides some policy recommendations for both organizations, particularly NATO, with a view to greater cooperation. The "five commandments" for NATO to improve its relations with the AL are as follows:

- *Be Strategic.* NATO should look for strategic partnership with the AL, and not see it simply as a source of legitimacy. Accordingly, the Alliance should be less ambitious in terms of "public diplomacy", and focus more on emphasizing the dynamics of its relations with the AL. In this regard, NATO should propose the establishment of a Joint Committee/Council with the AL. This body should meet regularly, allowing representatives from both organizations to address controversial issues boldly. They should transparently identify the significance of cooperation, the obstacles and challenges facing them, and the specific questions on which collaboration is essential.
- *Make use of existing frameworks.* NATO should think not in terms of replacing its partnership frameworks, but of complementing them. The MD and the ICI, in particular, have proved more successful in enhancing bilateral cooperation between NATO and individual partner countries under the 28+1 format. What is needed is a comprehensive framework that enhances multilateral cooperation between

²³ Personal interview with official from NATO HQ, Brussels, January 2013.



NATO and Arab countries under a 28+n format, as would be possible in the framework of cooperation with the AL. In other words, the Alliance should differentiate between two levels of cooperation with Arab countries: bilateral cooperation (achieved through MD and ICI), and multilateral cooperation (through the AL). While the two levels should remain distinct, they should work in synergy.

- *Make use of various tools.* NATO needs to think outside the box. It should look beyond its HQ in Brussels and the relatively small departments through which it interacts with the MD and ICI. NATO should make use of its educational institutions to function as a neutral ground for informal meetings with the AL, especially at a time when reciprocal visits between the two organizations may raise more questions than answers²⁴.
- *Don't run before you can walk, and take your partner with you.* It was not surprising that the AL expressed reservations on NATO's offer of signing a MoU. It seems that the AL was not involved in discussions on such a document, let alone its drafting. NATO should think of developing its relations with the AL as a gradual process, starting with a build-up of political dialogue and then possibly aiming at logistic support and military cooperation. As an

official from the Egyptian Ministry of Defence emphasized, meaningful cooperation between NATO and the AL must be gradual: for AL member states, such cooperation (particularly on a military level) is subject to effective cooperation at political level²⁵.

- *Be clear, concrete and straightforward.* NATO should be as clear and as concrete as possible while approaching Arab countries. Being generic in terms of cooperation projects will arouse suspicion. NATO should not aim at decorating its partnership projects towards Arab countries with cooperative security publicity, usually perceived by Arab countries as a mere cover for a hidden agenda.

In conclusion, NATO should not be imprisoned in its own frameworks, and should investigate alternative means of cooperation with the MENA region. The current developments that are taking place in most Arab countries reflect the insufficiency of the current frameworks for purposes of dealing with a rapidly changing region. NATO should capitalize on the sustained momentum in Arab countries created by the Arab Revolutions. The Alliance should invest in cooperation with regional organizations in the Arab world, particularly the AL. For both NATO and the AL, the important point to underline with regard to cooperation is, quite simply, "the sooner, the better".

²⁴ When a high-profile NATO delegation visited the Arab League's HQ in Cairo during the Syrian crisis, the AL Deputy Secretary General called a press conference to emphasize that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss relations between the two organizations, and that it was not to be considered a sign of an imminent intervention by NATO in Syria.

²⁵ Personal interview, Egyptian Ministry of Defence, Cairo, December 2012.